

See over

Added Forces Ordered to Gulf

By Bradley Graham and John Lancaster
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President Clinton asserted yesterday that the additional military forces he has ordered to the Persian Gulf region would be sufficient to protect American air patrols over Iraq and prevent Iraqi President Saddam Hussein from moving against oil-rich neighbors to the south.

"The United States will take whatever steps are necessary to protect our pilots as they enforce the expanded 'no-fly' zone and to defend our strategic interests," Clinton said in his weekly radio address. "I have ordered sufficient forces to the region to give us that capability."

The troop buildup has continued despite a declaration Friday by Iraq that it would stop attacking U.S. warplanes patrolling an expanded ban on Iraqi military flights over southern Iraq. One senior military official cautioned yesterday against assuming the prospect for new U.S. airstrikes had dissolved in the wake of Iraq's statement.

But Saddam appeared to be avoiding fresh

provocations. A Pentagon spokesman said U.S. officials had detected no new challenges to U.S. aircraft over Iraq. Asked whether Saddam had halted attempts to rebuild air defense sites struck by U.S. cruise missiles early this month, the official said Iraqi forces have simply been shifting mobile anti-aircraft units small distances over the past few days. The United States had bluntly warned Iraq not to reconstitute damaged air defenses.

As up to 5,000 Army soldiers prepared to leave Texas for Kuwait—the latest in a flow of additional planes, ships and ground forces to the gulf region raising the total above 30,000—Defense Secretary William J. Perry arrived in Saudi Arabia for another round of consultations with key gulf leaders about how to respond to Saddam. Clinton held a 10-minute phone conversation yesterday with Saudi King Fahd to officially notify the Saudi leader of Perry's visit, according to a White House official.

Iraq's state-owned media said yesterday the government's decision to cease shooting at

U.S. aircraft was aimed at defusing the military standoff with the United States.

"Iraq, by suspending its military reaction to violations of our national airspace, until further notice, provides another proof of its strong keenness to avoid the eruption of crises," the government-owned newspaper al-Jumhuriya said in a front-page editorial. The newspaper said the move was intended to "strip America of excuses and pretexts to commit a new crime."

The editorial stressed Iraq's "belief that dialogue is the only way to solve problems," but it was unclear whether the reference indicated Saddam's government would seek talks with the United States or its allies. But U.S. officials have said they would need to see some fundamental change in Iraq before considering diplomatic contact.

The newspaper commentary added to the impression Saddam is trying to undermine U.S. efforts to rally support among allies in the region for additional airstrikes against Iraq.

The U.S. missiles fired at Iraqi air defenses earlier this month were ordered by Clinton to

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'Sufficient,' Clinton Asserts

expand the southern no-fly zone in response to Iraq's brief invasion of the rebellious Kurdish area of northern Iraq. Iraqi troops helped one rival Kurdish faction oust another from control of a broad swath of territory.

When Iraqi forces moved defiantly to rebuild some damaged air defense sites and launched anti-aircraft missiles, Clinton authorized additional U.S. military forces to the region. But most of Washington's Arab allies have shown little enthusiasm for a stepped-up military campaign. Jordan and Saudi Arabia, for example, have declined any role in striking Iraq, forcing the United States to scramble for alternative bases from which to launch new attacks.

Baghdad's cease-fire announcement is sure to make that task even harder. Without a clear provocation from Iraq, Washington will have difficulty justifying retaliatory action to skittish Arab allies. On the other hand, for Clinton to hold his punch now, after a week of threatening retaliation and massing forces, would benefit Saddam and invite more Republican charges against Clinton of timidity and misdirection weeks before the November presidential elec-

tion. The Army troops headed to Kuwait are members of the 1st Cavalry Division at Fort Hood, Tex. Joining 1,200 Army soldiers already in Kuwait on a training exercise due to last until December, the added GIs will use tanks and other armored vehicles the United States has stored in the gulf state south of Iraq.

The enlarged ground contingent will be far from enough to attempt any invasion of Iraq. Officials said it was ordered to Kuwait largely to show force and demonstrate the United States can move troops quickly to the region.

Graham reported from Washington, Lancaster from Cairo. Staff writer John F. Harris contributed to this report.

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